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**United States Department of State**

# **Broken Promises: Sandinista Repression of Human Rights in Nicaragua**

**October 1984**



**INFORMATION AND DISINFORMATION IN NICARAGUA**

**by Frank Gomez**

**CENTRAL AMERICAN OUTREACH PROGRAM**

**THE WHITE HOUSE**

**WASHINGTON, D.C., AUGUST 15, 1984**

Sandinista corruption and violence breed bitter opposition.

## NICARAGUA'S UNTOLD STORIES

BY ROBERT S. LEIKEN

THE 72-YEAR-OLD señora lives in a solid stone house constructed by the Sandinista government. Her son, German Pomares, was a founder of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (F.S.L.N.) who perished leading the final offensive against Somoza in 1979. Set off by a well-kept garden from the shacks of the cotton field workers of El Viejo, Mrs. Pomares's home appears comfortable. But inside, the mother of the nationally revered martyr sleeps on a cot covered with rags, and she hobbles through bare, unfurnished rooms. She lives on a pension equivalent to \$10 a month. She has made four trips to the local hospital, but has yet to succeed in getting a doctor's appointment. Three times she has requested an audience with Comandante Tomas Borge, now the sole surviving founder of the F.S.L.N. Each time, her son's old comrade has refused to receive her.

For one who has sympathized with the Sandinistas, it is painful to look into the house they are building, but it is unwise not to. I spent ten days in Nicaragua in August, accompanied by my brother, a trade unionist from Boston. It was my sixth visit since the revolution, and my longest since 1981. I have testified in Congress against aid to the *contras* and have supported (and continue to support) negotiations to end the civil war in El Salvador. Yet each succeeding trip to Nicaragua drains my initial reservoir of sympathy for the Sandinistas. Last year I wrote in my introduction to a book treated by the press as the "Democratic alternative to the Kissinger Report" that the Sandinistas' "failure to preserve the revolutionary alliance with the middle class and small producers as well as sectarian political and cultural policies [had] polarized the country, led to disinvestment, falling productivity and wages, labor discontent, and an agrarian crisis." This visit convinced me that the situation is far worse than I had thought, and disabused me of some of the remaining myths about the Sandinista revolution.

Everywhere we went we confronted the disparity between these myths and the unpleasant truth. The Sandinistas blame Nicaragua's economic crisis on the *contra* war and U.S. economic sanctions. Yet the standard of living in Nicaragua was deteriorating well before the U.S.-backed *contras* turned to economic sabotage in the spring of 1983.

Robert S. Leiken is a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment and the editor of *Central America: Anatomy of Conflict*. (Pergamon-Carnegie).

A December 1981 internal staff memorandum of the International Monetary Fund found that real wages had fallen 71 percent since July 1979. They have continued to decline in succeeding years. And even with the U.S. "economic boycott," over 25 percent of Nicaragua's exports still go to the United States, not much less than under Somoza. Nicaragua can no longer sell sugar at subsidized prices to the United States, but what it has lost in this market it has sold to Iran at prices above those of the world market. The war and U.S. sanctions have compounded a mess created by the Sandinistas themselves.

Nicaraguans themselves do not seem to accept Sandinista claims that *Yanqui* aggression is responsible for the general scarcity of consumer goods. Peasants are obligated to sell their goods to the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, and contend that its prices are too low to enable them to make ends meet. A large portion of the peasantry is now producing only for its own consumption, and the resulting shortages have dramatically driven up prices. The marketplace, once the bustling center of Nicaraguan life, is now a daunting experience for buyers and sellers alike. As shoppers make the rounds looking for rice, beans, milk, toilet paper, soap, or light bulbs, the shopkeepers' constant reply is "*No hay*" (There isn't any). For anyone unable to afford the inflated prices or without the foreign exchange to shop at the new foreign currency stores, Eastern European-style queuing is now routine.

One of the most depressing aspects of our trip was to hear from so many that their lives are worse today than they were at the time of Somoza. Before the revolution Nicaraguans ate well by Central American standards. Thanks to the country's fertile soil and its small population, even poor Nicaraguans were accustomed to beef and chicken. Now consumer goods available to the masses in other Central American countries are no longer obtainable. Barefoot children are hardly uncommon in the region, but I had never seen so many completely naked. As we encountered them, their distended stomachs displaying the telltale signs of malnutrition, Nicaraguans would bitterly recall the government slogan, "*Los niños son los mimados de la revolucion*" ("Children are the spoiled ones of the revolution").

The shortage of basic necessities is also breeding pervasive corruption. When we asked a rural storekeeper why he was able to sell Coca-Cola while many restaurants in Managua were not, he said that he had obtained the soft

La Prensa Editor's Statement  
on Lack of Press Freedom in Nicaragua

Introduction

Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, Jr., the Co-director of La Prensa -- Nicaragua's only opposition newspaper -- has gone into exile to Costa Rica with his family. Chamorro charged that the Sandinista's censorship and further restrictions made his work impossible to continue. Mr. Chamorro is the son of the late publisher of La Prensa, Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, a harsh critic of the Somoza regime and whose murder in 1978 sparked vast Nicaraguan and international condemnation of Somoza.

The following text is the statement Chamorro made upon his arrival in Costa Rica, December 15, 1984, on self-imposed exile. Chamorro explained that he left Nicaragua because of the persistent and flagrant censorship, and that he would use his journalist's pen outside of Nicaragua, where his writings could be published and be more effective. The crackdown on La Prensa and the ban on opposition leaders' departure from the country since the November elections is further evidence of Sandinista disregard for political pluralism.

I'LL COME BACK WHEN THERE IS FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

San Jose, December 15th, 1984

Writing, reporting and giving my opinions for publication ...that is my profession. For almost three years I have not been able to exercise this right because a government censor dictates from day to day what can be published and what cannot be published.

I have borne with patience the whimsical dictates of the censor during all these years, but my patience is exhausted.

I feel that our job as an information medium is definitely curtailed by the imagination or the whims and fancies of a censor, who sees in every informative paragraph, in every editorial, or in every opinion expressed by a citizen, an attack against the all-powerful and ever-present "security of the State".

A news item about a 96-year-old lady who committed suicide because she was tired of her existence, is looked on as an attack against the psychic health of the people and, therefore, an attack against the "security of the State".

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# **Resource Book**

## **Sandinista Elections in Nicaragua**

# WHITE HOUSE DIGEST

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## NICARAGUAN REPRESSION OF MISKITO INDIANS

### THE CHRISTMAS EXODUS

Heightened repression of Miskito Indians in Nicaragua by the Nicaraguan government has once again gained outside attention. Since 1979, Sandinista practices of confiscation of private property and the forced export of local agricultural products has left the population facing severe shortages. The east coast Indian population has also had to face shortages of other food items, medical and school supplies, and clothing.

Despite Sandinista assertions concerning the releases of many Miskito political prisoners in the fall of 1983, and the Nicaraguan government's promotion of a limited amnesty, Miskito Indians continue to flee the country due to the lack of freedom.

The amnesty is limited in time (it covers only the period after December 1981) and in scope (only northern Zelaya province). The Indians are dissatisfied because they must return to Nicaragua, without any guarantees of safety, to take advantage of the program.

Opposition leaders have also stated that the amnesty does nothing to redress the grievances that prompted them to flee Nicaragua in the first place.

The Christmas exodus of over one thousand Miskitos who fled to Honduras on foot and at times under attack by government troops took place against a background of Sandinista repression and cruelty. Because the Sandinistas have prohibited domestic and international press from traveling to the region without first obtaining a special permit, news from the east coast is difficult to obtain.



# Free Trade Union News

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## Nicaragua

# A Revolution Betrayed; Free Labor Persecuted

By WILLIAM C. DOHERTY, JR.  
Executive Director  
American Institute for Free Labor Development

*This documentary explains in detail how the Sandinista Government has all but destroyed the free trade unions in Nicaragua and why the AFL-CIO unanimously adopted the following resolution.*

For decades the AFL-CIO extended solidarity to the workers of Nicaragua in their struggle against the vicious dictatorship of Anastasio Somoza. Ours was the only organization to respond to the request of the "Confederacion de Unificacion Sindical (CUS) for a boycott against Somoza's merchant shipping.

The hopes raised by the July 1979 victory of the Sandinista revolution against Somoza have been shattered. The Carter Administration, backed by the AFL-CIO, had demonstrated its support of the revolution by granting substantial economic assistance to the new government. But that government has become dominated by totalitarian elements which have established a dictatorship that all but destroyed the right to strike, to organize or to bargain collectively without interference.

The Nicaraguan government has jailed seven dock-worker union leaders for recommending that their union in Corinto rejoin the CUS. The AFL-CIO fully supports the ICFTU protest to the ILO against this violation of trade union rights.

Cuban-style block committees requiring brother to spy on brother have been established under the new San-

dinista police state. The last remaining independent newspaper, *La Prensa*, has been repeatedly shut down. The right of habeas corpus is nonexistent.

The Nicaraguan defense minister, Comandante Humberto Ortega, has publicly stated that if elections are to be held at all, they will be to "consolidate revolutionary power, not to call it into question."

The AFL-CIO condemns the betrayal of the Nicaraguan revolution by the Sandinista government and opposes economic aid to the regime.

*(Resolution adopted in October 1983 at the AFL-CIO 15th Constitutional Convention, Hollywood, Florida.)*

Upon coming to power in July 1979, the Sandinista Front for National Liberation (FSLN) immediately began its campaign to destroy the two democratic trade union centers in Nicaragua, the "Confederacion de Unificacion Sindical" (CUS), affiliated to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), and the Christian-oriented "Central de Trabajadores de Nicaragua" (CTN), affiliated to the World Confederation of Labor (WCL). Both international organizations have their headquarters in Brussels. The AFL-CIO is an affiliate of the ICFTU.

Within hours of taking control, the Sandinista leadership formed the "Central Sandinista de Trabajadores" (CST), and insisted that all unions should belong to one trade union central. When the CUS and CNT declined, stating that they already represented democratic unions affiliated regionally

with the free and democratic hemispheric organizations of the ICFTU and the WCL, the FSLN embarked on a unification plan that violated every concept of human and trade union rights.

• The FSLN strategy was revealed almost immediately after they assumed power. Scarcely a month had gone by when it was brought to the attention of the Minister of Labor that on August 24, 1979, an election of the Union of Carpenters and Masons was convoked by the International Brigade "Simon Bolivar." The election was held in the presence of uniformed and heavily armed guards and without the participation of the previously elected executive committee. The election was permitted to stand.

• August 28, 1979 — In a letter to the Government Junta for National Reconstruction, a copy of which was published in the newspaper *La Prensa*, the CUS complained that armed members of the FSLN were harassing their trade union leaders and disrupting their activities, and that "comandantes" in Corinto and Chinandega were accusing the CUS leaders of being thieves, sell-outs, imperialists and counter-revolutionaries. The CUS reminded the Junta of its participation in the battle against Somoza and that their Secretary General Luis Medrano Flores was killed by the Somoza forces on January 9, 1979.

• December 1979 — The CTN's headquarters in Managua was shot up by Sandinista troops.

• January 1980 — The CTN's re-

# **Comandante Bayardo Arce's Secret Speech before the Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN)**

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# WHITE HOUSE DIGEST

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### PERSECUTION OF CHRISTIAN GROUPS IN NICARAGUA

"The religion of the workers has no God, because it seeks to restore the divinity of Man."

Karl Marx

"Every religious idea, every idea of a god, even flirting with the idea of a god, is unutterable vileness of the most dangerous kind, 'contagion' of the most abominable kind. Millions of sins, filthy deeds, acts of violence, and physical contagions are far less dangerous than the subtle spiritual idea of a god."

Lenin

History has shown us that Communist regimes inevitably seek to either eradicate the Church or to subvert it. Ideologically, the Church's existence is repugnant to them. Allegiance to God prevents total allegiance to and subjugation by the State, which, according to Marx, is the salvific vehicle for the secular transformation of man into god.

The Communists cannot tolerate this limitation on their absolute power. Thus, in the Soviet Union all but a tiny percentage of churches have been closed and religious affiliation routinely brings the loss of precious privileges and sometimes brings more serious persecution.

In Nicaragua, the self-admitted Marxist-Leninist (1) leaders of the government are following the same path. They are seeking to turn the Catholic Church, by far the largest in Nicaragua, into an arm of the government.